

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 307451
ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 PRS-01 H-01 SSM-03
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DRAFTED BY NEA/P:MKBERRY:RGH
APPROVED BY NEA/P:GFSHERMAN
S/PRS - MR. FUNSETH (INFO)
H - MR. FLATEN (INFO)
SSM - MR. MC ANDREW
NEA - MS. GRIFFIN
NEA/ARN - MR. DRAPER
NEA/IAI - MR. SMITH

----- 073129 /71

O 202236Z DEC 76
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USMISSION SINAI
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
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PAGE 02 STATE 307451

AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION NATO
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
CINCEUR

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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL, CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING - DECEMBER 20

FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS
FROM DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S PRESS BRIEFING FOR DECEMBER 20,
1976:

Q. ISRAEL IS NOW UNDERGOING SOME CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL
UNCERTAINTY. COULD YOU TELL US WHAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT
THINKS THE IMPACT MIGHT BE ON MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS
PROSPECTS?

A. I HAVE NO JUDGEMENT ON THAT.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THE SYRIAN SEIZURE OF NEWS-
PAPERS IN LEBANON, INCLUDING TWO AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS?
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PAGE 03 STATE 307451

A. I UNDERSTAND THE TWO AMERICAN AGENT OFFICES HAVE
REOPENED THIS MORNING. IN ANY CASE, OUR SUPPORT FOR THE
PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS WELL KNOWN. WE
STRONGLY DEPLORE VIOLATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE WHEREVER THEY
OCCUR IN THE WORLD.

Q. WAS THIS A VIOLATION OF THAT PRINCIPLE? BESIDES YOUR

GENERAL STATEMENT I WISH YOU WOULD RESPOND TO THE SITUATION
AT HAND.

A. ON BACKGROUND, THE ONLY INFORMATION I HAVE IS -- AND
I AM NOT DEPRECATING IT BY SAYING "ONLY" -- BUT THE ONLY
INFORMATION I HAVE IS PUBLIC REPORTS OF WHAT HAPPENED.
BUT, ON BACKGROUND, IT CERTAINLY APPEARS TO ME THAT THIS
IS A VIOLATION OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WHEN NEWSPAPER
OFFICES ARE CLOSED.

Q. DID THE UNITED STATES COMMUNICATE WITH ANY OF THE PARTIES ABOUT THIS?

A. AS OF THIS MORNING WE ARE LOOKING INTO THIS.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHETHER IT WAS A VIOLATION OF THE UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED IN RIYADH AND CAIRO?

A. I DO NOT KNOW.

Q. WHEN YOU SAY YOU ARE LOOKING INTO IT, DOES THAT MEAN YOU DID OR YOU DID NOT COMMUNICATE?

A. WE ARE LOOKING INTO THE MATTER.

Q. YES. BUT, THE QUESTION WAS: ARE YOU COMMUNICATING WITH ANYBODY ABOUT IT?
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PAGE 04 STATE 307451

Q. ON THE SAME ISSUE, I THINK THIS IS GETTING VERY PICAYUNE, BUT IF YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THE AMERICAN NEWS AGENCIES INVOLVED HAVE BEEN REOPENED, I TAKE IT THAT IS AN UNDERSTANDING BASED BEYOND NEWS REPORTS. SO, THEREFORE, YOU MUST HAVE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO YOU CONCERNING AN-NAHAR AND THE OTHER PAPERS THAT HAVE BEEN OCCUPIED BY THE SYRIAN ARMY, THAT GOES BEYOND NEWSPAPER REPORTS. I AM A LITTLE BIT PUZZLED BY WHAT I THINK IS AN AMBIGUOUS OR HESITANT ACTION ON YOUR PART TO CONDEMN WHAT APPEARS TO BE A CLEAR VIOLATION OF WHAT AMERICAN POLICY HAS BEEN.

A. ON BACKGROUND, THE ONLY INFORMATION WE HAVE THIS MORNING IS THAT WE UNDERSTAND NEWSWEEK AND UPI REOPENED, BUT THAT THE OTHER PAPERS REMAINED CLOSED. THAT IS ALL I HAVE. BUT, I STAND FOUR SQUARE BY THE STATEMENT I MADE INITIALLY -- THAT WE STRONGLY DEPLORE VIOLATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE WHEREVER THEY OCCUR.

Q. DO YOU DEPLORE SYRIAN VIOLATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE?

A. WE DEPLORE VIOLATIONS WHEREVER THEY OCCUR.

Q. ARE YOU WILLING TO PUT THE WORD "SYRIAN" IN THERE IN THIS CURRENT EVENT?

A. I THINK THAT WHAT I HAVE SAID THIS MORNING IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT I HAVE SAID WHEN VIOLATIONS OCCUR ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

Q. MONTHS AGO WHEN SYRIA FIRST MOVED INTO LEBANON YOU ALMOST DAILY MADE A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY. I WONDER IF YOU COULD ASSESS FOR US, NOW THAT THE DUST IS SETTLING, WHAT THE STATE OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY IS FROM A U.S. VIEWPOINT AND WHAT THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 05 STATE 307451

PROSPECTS ARE OF SYRIA WITHDRAWING ITS FORCES FROM LEBANON?

A. I THINK THE LAST QUESTION ABOUT WITHDRAWAL OF THE ARAB PEACEKEEPING FORCE SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE LEBANESE. THAT FORCE IS THERE WITH THE CONSENT OF THE PRESENT LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. LEBANON NOW HAS A PRESIDENT AND THEY HAVE A PRIME MINISTER AND THEY HAVE A GOVERNMENT AND THAT IS WELL KNOWN.

Q. ABOUT THE FUTURE OF LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY, DO YOU SEE IT AS VERY BRIGHT THIS MORNING?

A. WE HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS WILL BE ABLE TO BIND THE WOUNDS IN LEBANON AND WE CERTAINLY SUPPORT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM, OF COURSE, CONFRONTING LEBANON TODAY IS THE ECONOMIC QUESTION AND THIS IS ONE WHICH WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING WITH HIS ENVOY, GHASSAN TUEINI, WHO CAME HERE AT OUR INVITATION AND WHO WILL BE BACK IN WASHINGTON DURING THE COURSE OF THIS WEEK FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH AMERICAN OFFICIALS.

Q. WHAT IS THE AMOUNT OF AID THAT THE LEBANESE ENVOY IS ASKING FOR?

A. I DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING ON THAT. I DO NOT KNOW THAT WE HAVE A FIGURE YET. I THINK THE INITIAL TALKS -- AT LEAST, IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING -- CONCERNED THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM. I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER WE HAVE GOTTEN DOWN TO ACTUAL COST FIGURES.

Q. COULD YOU CHECK, BECAUSE IT'S --

A. I WILL, YES. I WILL CHECK.

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PAGE 06 STATE 307451

Q. WHAT EFFECT DO YOU THINK THE POLITICAL UNREST IN ISRAEL MIGHT HAVE ON NEGOTIATIONS PROSPECTS? I WAS ASKING PREVIOUSLY FOR A JUDGMENT, AND YOU DIDN'T HAVE ONE; BUT CAN YOU TELL ME IN A PRACTICAL WAY: CAN THERE BE CONTINUED EFFORTS BY THE UNITED STATES TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION AND PROMOTE NEGOTIATIONS, IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ISRAEL?

A. YOU ARE ASKING ME ESSENTIALLY ABOUT AN INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW THAT WOULD AFFECT THE LARGER PROBLEM OF THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AND I THINK -- CERTAINLY SPEAKING FOR THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION -- OUR EFFORTS CONTINUE. THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION HAS ALSO GONE ON RECORD AS SAYING THAT THIS IS A SUBJECT OF HIGH PRIORITY. I JUST REALLY CANNOT GO BEYOND SAYING THAT.

Q. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU'RE SAYING YOU THINK THE RABIN GOVERNMENT IS IN A STABLE ENOUGH POSITION THAT YOU CAN CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH THEM REGARDING NEGOTIATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, OR ARE YOU SORT OF HOLDING BACK AND AWAITING DEVELOPMENTS?

A. I HAVE SEEN NOTHING THAT WOULD SUGGEST THAT ANYONE IS HOLDING BACK IN TERMS OF PURSUING THE MIDDLE EAST EFFORT, BUT I HAVE -- PLEASE REMEMBER THAT A NEW ADMINISTRATION IS TAKING OVER THE 20TH OF JANUARY AND I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN A POSITION OF MAKING ASSESSMENTS ON THEIR BEHALF FOR THE PERIOD WHEN THEY WILL HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY.

Q. SECRETARY-GENERAL WALDHEIM IN AN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED TODAY SAYS THAT HE'S RECEIVED STRONG ENCOURAGEMENT, BOTH FROM THE UNITED STATES AND FROM ARAB GOVERNMENTS, AND IS SEEKING THE SAME KIND OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO INTERVENE ACTIVELY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.
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PAGE 07 STATE 307451

CAN YOU CONFIRM THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS ENCOURAGED WALDHEIM IN THESE EFFORTS, AND WHAT'S OUR GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD IT?

A. I THINK THE SECRETARY SAID IN GENERAL TERMS THAT WE CERTAINLY SUPPORTED THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S EFFORTS, AFTER HIS MEETING WITH HIM LAST WEEK. I CANNOT GO BEYOND THAT.

2. THE FOLLOWING ANSWERS WERE POSTED IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ASKED AT BRIEFING:

Q. HOW MUCH AID IS THE LEBANESE ENVOY REQUESTING?

A. MR. TUEINI HAS NOT SUGGESTED A FIGURE FOR U.S. PARTICIPATION IN HIS COUNTRY'S RELIEF, REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS. HE HAS OUTLINED THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES OF PHYSICAL DESTRUCTION AND PROVIDED SOME INSIGHT INTO THEIR PRIORITIES. WE HOPE TO BE HELPFUL BUT HAVE NO DETAILS TO GIVE OUT AT THIS TIME.

Q. HAS THE U.S. COMMUNICATED WITH ANY OF THE PARTIES CONCERNED ABOUT THE CLOSING OF SOME NEWSPAPERS IN BEIRUT?

A. OUR EMBASSY IS LOOKING INTO THIS MATTER. I DO NOT WANT TO GET INTO WHAT CONTACTS IT IS HAVING. OUR POSITION IS CLEAR. WE SUPPORT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND DEPLORE VIOLATIONS OF THAT PRINCIPLE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. BUT THIS IS FUNDAMENTALLY A LEBANESE AFFAIR FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO HANDLE.

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